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ABSTRACT

Part of the Australian "Reading Around Series," this document offers a set of guidelines for fostering cooperative learning in a language arts classroom. The problems with competitive and/or individual learning, and the reasoning behind cooperative learning, are presented in the first section of the document. The second section outlines the key features of a cooperative learning environment, including the fostering of interpersonal and small-group skills, positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, and individual accountability. The next section offers a unit on creative use of synonyms for year three, while the fourth section offers a three-week story writing unit for year six. The fifth section outlines a video production unit for year nine students, and the sixth section offers a one to three lessons unit on clear thinking for year eleven students. The final section suggests ways to organize a one-lesson unit and offers helpful hints for encouraging cooperative learning in the classroom. (JC)

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Australian Reading Association

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No.1

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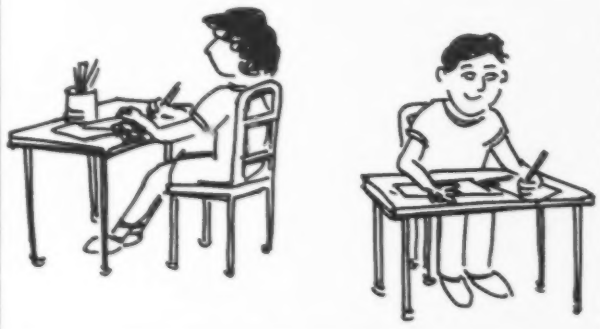
COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES APPLIED IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Heather Fehring

The need for cooperation between people is reflected in all aspects of life - the family, the community, the workforce, sports teams and society in general. And yet, so often in our schools and classrooms we over-emphasise learning environments which operate on an individual or a competitive basis.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING
The classroom is organised so that students work by themselves. The emphasis is on students working individually on their assignments or projects.



COMPETITIVE LEARNING
Learning is a contest where students test themselves against other students. In a sense, one student wins only if the others lose.

STRUCTURING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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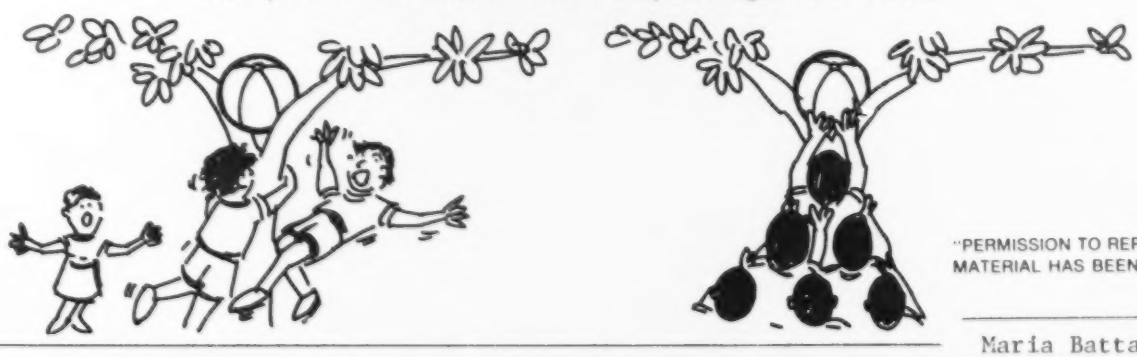
COOPERATIVE LEARNING
Fostering cooperative learning strategies in schools is an attempt to build an effective learning environment by encouraging students to learn with and from each other. A cooperative environment utilises small-group learning techniques and all the different abilities offered by a heterogeneous classroom.



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WHAT ARE THE KEY FEATURES OF A COOPERATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

Cooperative learning is all about small cohesive groups of students functioning together as a working unit. To achieve such a situation we need to concentrate on several key teaching and learning points:

1 Interpersonal and Small-Group Skills

The development of interpersonal and small-group skills is a key element for effective cooperative learning. It cannot be assumed that students are born with such skills. Although it takes time to develop such attributes, they are fundamental to effective working relationships within a group.

Examples of Interpersonal and Small-Group Skills

- communicating
- listening
- patience
- tolerance of each other's differences
- ability to work with others
- ability to organise oneself and others
- sharing
- leadership
- conflict-resolution
- decision-making

2 Positive Interdependence

There is a need to create an atmosphere of positive interdependence between group members. Such interdependence provides the reason for working together thus encouraging cooperation. All members of the learning group must participate, and learn to help each other learn. There are several ways to achieve such a result:

Goal Interdependence A mutual group goal, or a joint group product provides a basis for the group member's dependence on each other.

Resource Interdependence Achieved by dividing materials, resources or information among group members.

Role Interdependence Assigning students specific roles within a group can heighten each student's sense of responsibility for the total group's success, and promote the concept of shared leadership which is so important to cooperative learning. One way to achieve such an aim is to divide the work required to complete a task between the group members. Thus, each student has a specific job or responsibility to undertake.

3 Face-to-Face Interaction

Face-to-face interaction among students is essential because it maximises the opportunities for students to question and discuss among themselves and thus learn from each other.

4 Individual Accountability

It is also essential to develop a feeling of personal responsibility for the achievement of the group's goal. In effect, each individual is accountable for the learning and understanding of the whole group.

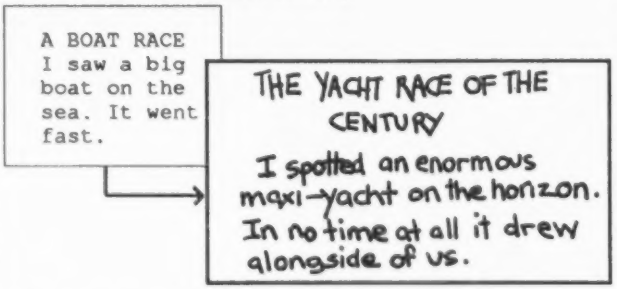
The following section provides examples of practical lessons utilising the theoretical principles of cooperative learning.

Year 3 - Creative use of Synonyms
One Lesson Unit

COOPERATIVE LEARNING PRINCIPLES

ACTION

- Use already established cooperative learning groups of three to four children.
  - Heterogeneous Grouping
- The teacher clarifies the group task which in this case is to recreate a story, using interesting synonyms. Children need to know that the purpose of the task is not to replace small words with large words, but to create a more interesting story. In addition, the teacher may also inform the children of a cooperative group goal that he/she will be looking for during the lesson. In this unit a teacher may look and discuss with the groups *Interpersonal and Small-Group Skills*. For example, how to listen to each other's ideas and ways of coming to a consensus of opinion about the structure of the new story.
  - Goal Interdependence


A BOAT RACE
I saw a big boat on the sea. It went fast.
THE YACHT RACE OF THE CENTURY
I spotted an enormous maxi-yacht on the horizon. In no time at all it drew alongside of us.

- Each group member is to have a specific responsibility to assist in the completion of this task. The roles could be:
  - Individual Accountability

Checker checks the dictionary or thesaurus for the accuracy of suggested alternatives.

Writer keeps a note of the group's responses and writes up the final version of the new story.

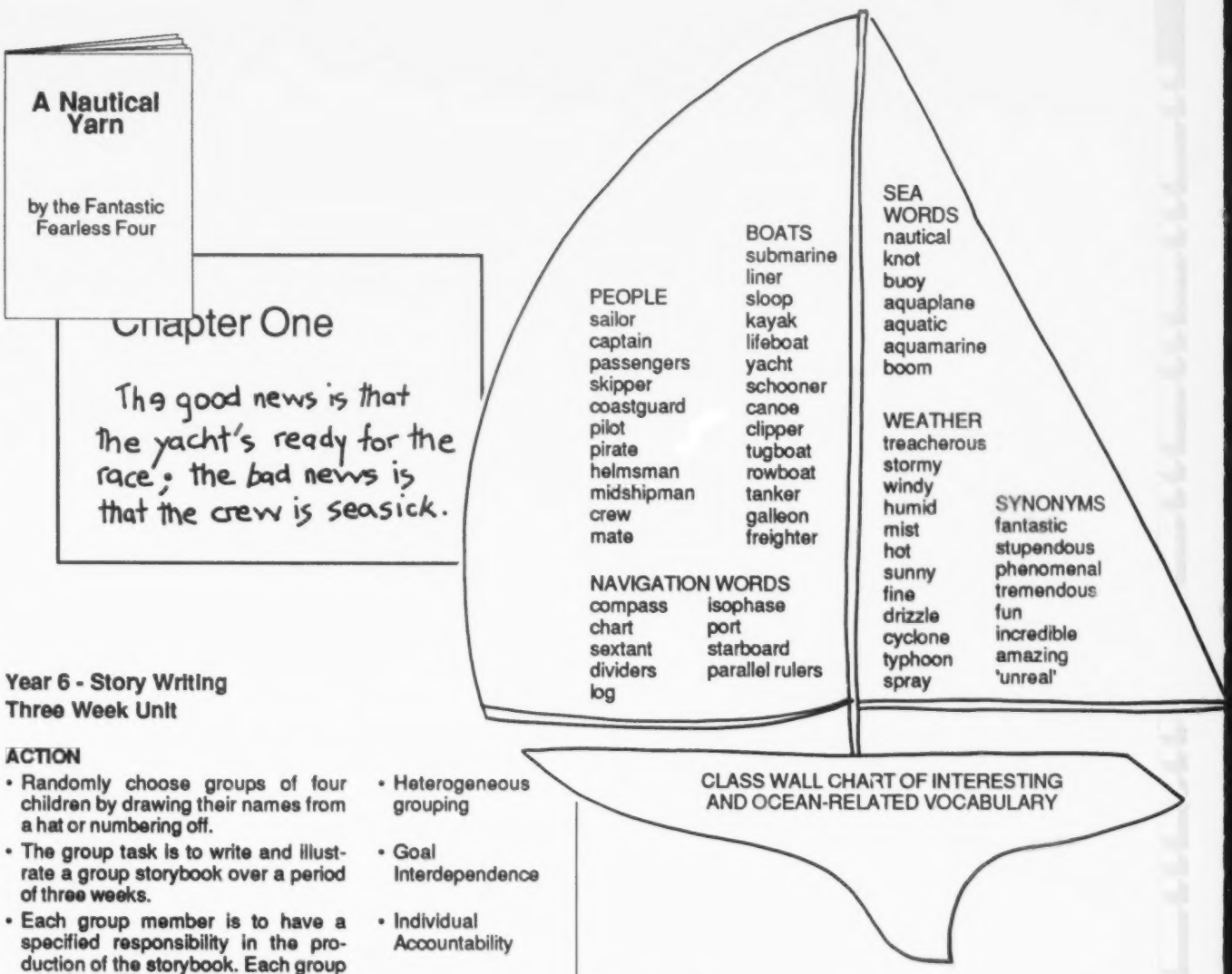
Time-Keeper keeps the group on task and makes sure all aspects of the job are finalised

Reader reads the group's new story to the class.

  - Role Interdependence

Organisation

- Each group reads the story given to them by the teacher; all group members brainstorm possible new synonym suggestions. The checker uses the dictionary and /or the thesaurus to check the accuracy of the synonyms suggested as alternatives; the group comes to a consensus of opinion about the new structure of the story; making sure everyone understands the new version, and then reads the story to the teacher or class.
  - The development of Interpersonal and Small-Group Skills
  - listening
  - communicating
  - sharing
  - decision-making-taking turns
  - consensus making



CLASS WALL CHART OF INTERESTING AND OCEAN-RELATED VOCABULARY

Year 6 - Story Writing
Three Week Unit

ACTION

- Randomly choose groups of four children by drawing their names from a hat or numbering off. • Heterogeneous grouping
- The group task is to write and illustrate a group storybook over a period of three weeks. • Goal Interdependence
- Each group member is to have a specified responsibility in the production of the storybook. Each group may take responsibility for individual role allocation. However, the teacher may choose and delineate roles which reflect functions in the writing process. As, for example: • Individual Accountability

Writer keeps the rough notes and writes up the final version of the story • Role Interdependence

Proof Reader checks and corrects spelling and grammatical errors in the story.

Illustrator designs the layout and illustrates the story.

Reader reads the group's story to other children.

Note
With this particular unit, it is important to remember that, even though the children have specific roles to fulfil, they can also assist each other with the different aspects of the project.

Organisation

Groups are formed, children decide their own individual roles and a name for their group. All group members brainstorm the story-line ideas and come to a consensus of opinion about their storybook structure, layout, design and graphics. Children can help each other with the total production but each child knows they have a specific responsibility. For example, any group member can check the dictionary for the proof reader, or colour in a sketch designed by the illustrator. (It is easier if the storybook is kept at school until the final production is completed.)

- The development of Interpersonal and Small-Group Skills
- planning
- decision-making
- listening to each other's ideas
- negotiation and conflict-resolution
- consensus making

The teacher's role can take on a dual function during this unit. Group conferences can be conducted regarding specific writing points - grammar, spelling, story forms, story structure, etc. In addition, the teacher can utilise the time to discuss specific cooperative learning principles with each group - What is individual accountability? Why is it important to each group's success? How do we settle a difference of opinion in our group?

Year 9 - The Making of a Video
One Term Unit

ACTION

- The group task is to produce a video of a chosen class story.

Preliminary

- Previous groundwork in the need for, and the ways in which cooperative learning groups work.
- Class story-writing sessions.
- The choice of a story which could be scripted and performed for a video production.
  In this case, the whole class provides the actors and actresses for the video. Smaller groups are responsible for the various jobs to be completed in the production of a video.

For example:

1 *Script Writers*

2 *Scheduling Team* (flow chart production, time schedule organisation, coordination of expert groups, continuity)

3 *Prop Crew* (costumes, scenery, music, sound effects, make-up)

4 *Camera Crew* (director, camera person, sound person)

5 *Location Team* (travel arrangements, bus to locations if necessary, letter of permission to parents, gala night arrangements, media release to local newspaper)

COOPERATIVE LEARNING PRINCIPLES

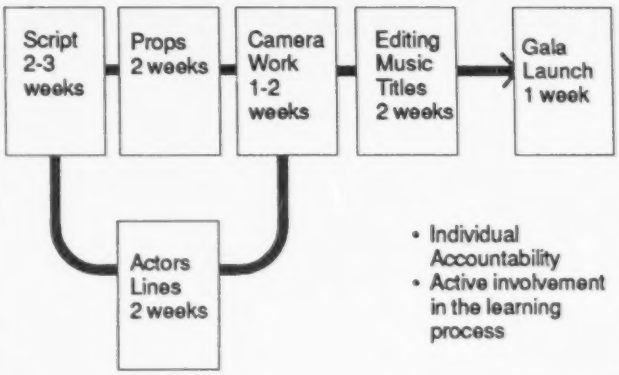
- Establishment of a cooperative classroom climate.
- Role Interdependence

Organisation

- The teacher's role will be to act as a facilitator to each of the subgroups.
- A good start to this unit would be a visit to a TV studio to see all the necessary video functions. Encourage students to identify all the tasks and take responsibility for role and task allocation.
- **The selection of task group members may be organised in various ways, for example:**
  - **calling for volunteers**
  - **holding class elections**
  - **random assignment**
  - **based on the talents of each individual**
- **Encourage task groups to analyse their jobs and specify the materials and time schedule needed to produce required parts on time. (Each group could keep a planning diary as a unit requirement.) The task analysis information provides the basis for a flow chart which will assist in coordinating individual lesson goals and time schedules.**

- Interpersonal Skills
  - tolerance
  - patience
  - ability to communicate with others
  - responsibility
- Small-Group Skills
  - Negotiation
  - Decision-making
  - Conflict resolution
  - Organisation

A SUGGESTED TIME SCHEDULE



- Individual Accountability
- Active involvement in the learning process

Assessment

A variety of assessment techniques can be developed for all units, this is one example.

- Each group could be encouraged to critically analyse their own performances by completing a 'Self-Evaluation Survey'. For example:

1 How well did you work as a team?

- Did everyone pitch in and do their part? YES/NO
- Were you on time? YES/NO
- Did you help each other when needed YES/NO

2 What decision-making processes were used by your team?

- voting YES/NO
- loudest voice
- open discussion
- consensus of opinion

Note
Students can use survey results to set themselves goals for the next cooperative group work. Teachers can use the survey results to involve students in learning experiences which will further develop, or introduce new cooperative learning skills.

Year 11 - Clear Thinking Exercise
One to Three Lessons Unit

ACTION

- Randomly choose groups of three to five students. A variety of methods can be used, such as: numbering off or drawing names from a hat.
- The group task is to logically analyse and critically evaluate the arguments forwarded by the author of a selected piece of writing.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING PRINCIPLES

- Heterogeneous grouping

Material

1 Controversial newspaper article

If we lose the cup, blame Perth club's waste, says Bond

By KEITH WHEATLEY

FREMANTLE. — Alan Bond said yesterday that if the America's Cup was won by an overseas challenger, the Royal Perth Yacht Club would be responsible. It had creamed off sponsorship dollars to mount an extravaganza that had deprived the defence syndicates of vital funds, he said.

"All the Royal Perth need is two buoys, a couple of boats and the juries. They don't require $16 million to defend the cup," said Bond, whose America's Cup Defence Syndicate is joint top of the defenders' points table. "All they have to do is fire the start gun.

"They are going to end up with a substantial profit. That money should have gone to the defence of the cup."

Bond said his syndicate was facing a budget deficit of about $5 million and he believed the Kookaburra syndicate was looking at probably treble that figure.

"If we lose the cup it may well turn out that the profit they have creamed off should have gone into technology that would have enabled us to mount a successful defence," Bond said.

His relationship with the Royal Perth Yacht Club has always been a rocky one, from the day he first challenged for the cup with Southern Cross in 1974.

"They waste money, quite frankly," he said. "They have got people everywhere, facilities that are not needed. Enormous amounts of money have been wasted on extravaganzas. The yacht club should have handed that money over to the syndicates."

"The cup does not belong to the yacht club. It is only the custodian of the cup. I think we as a syndicate won the cup and the right to market the event."

Noel Robins, who was helmsman for Bond in his 1977 challenge and is now the Royal Perth Yacht Club's cup director, said the club would make a profit, but nothing like the $10 million Bond suggested.

"Right from the beginning we had an agreement with the defenders that they would build the yachts and we would run the event," Robins said. "If we have made a profit, so be it. I don't expect that Alan Bond would have come running to us if he had made a profit — and I'm not sure that he hasn't."

The Royal Perth Yacht Club expects gross income to be about $8 million and costs about $5 million. Any surplus will go into a sporting trust administered with the International Yacht Racing Union.

PAGE 28: New Zealand, Stars and Stripes to contest final.

2 Question sheet to help guide each group's deliberations

1 What are the writer's main contentions?
2 What supporting arguments does the writer provide?
3 Make a judgement about the quality of the supporting arguments.

Are they emotional
factual
irrelevant
logical?

4 How did you support your judgement?

- Each group member is to have a specific role, for example:
  Time Keeper keeps group on task and covering all questions in allotted time.
  Checker makes sure everyone has a turn.
  Clarifyer makes sure everyone in the group understands
  Researcher finds specific information to check the accuracy of the arguments in the article. For example dates, times, numbers, other newspaper reports of the same accident.
  Writer keeps notes for class presentation at the end of the session/s.

- Role Interdependence

- Face-to-Face Interaction in Small Discussion Groups
- Interpersonal Skills
  - listening
  - sharing
  - communicating
  - tolerance

- Each group is to be responsible for role allocation and task completion.

- Small-Group Skills
  - negotiation
  - conflict-resolution
  - decision-making

- Teacher can choose a reporter for each group *after* the task is completed; this encourages the group members to make sure everyone understands.

- Individual Accountability

Assessment Option

As each group presents its decisions, the other students can act as a jury, making a judgement about the presentation, using pre-determined and agreed upon criteria.

Jury Considerations	
1	Clarity of presentation
2	Logical analysis of arguments
3	Brevity
4	Use of supportive information

Note
This clear thinking unit is ideally suited to be modified into a jigsaw technique.

The 'jigsaw' technique is a simple cooperative learning strategy whereby a class is divided into small groups of 4-5 students called *Home Teams*. Each home team is given the same task, for example, discuss a controversial newspaper article, analyse a novel. The task is then divided into various manageable parts, themes or questions. Each student in each home team chooses a question to explore. The students from each home team dealing with the same question, form an '*Expert Group*' together. Each expert group only discusses one question. On completion of the task (teacher may choose a time limit), each expert group member must return to his/her home team and teach the members of the home team what they have learnt. Using this technique a task is divided into more manageable parts: each student being responsible for finding out about, and teaching his/her team mates about one aspect of the whole; and in turn, must rely on his/her team mates to reciprocate. In this fashion the whole topic, task or theme is put together like a jigsaw.

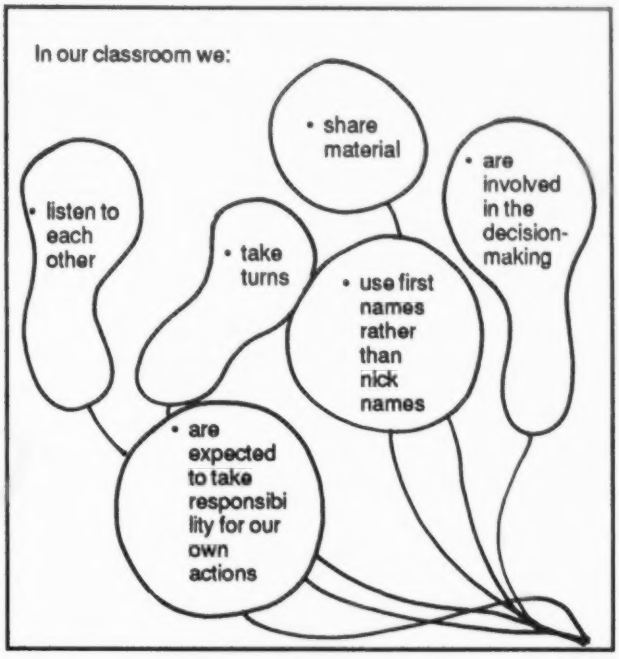
Organisation of a 1 Lesson Unit

Home Team
- Team formation
- Teacher distributes task
- Expert Group membership decided
  (2-3 minutes)

Expert Group
- Discussion by individual expert groups of their particular question
  (25-30 minutes)

Home Team
- Return to home team
- Share information learned in each expert group with whole home team.
  (15-20 minutes)

HELPFUL HINTS
- Cooperative learning seems to be more effective with groups of three to five students. However, you may need to start students off in pairs and concentrate on the teaching and learning of very specific social skills of cooperation before working up to larger groups.
- It takes time for students to establish working relationships with other students, so don't jump in too quickly to solve a problem or change a group's membership.
- Hold small-group and whole-class discussion sessions where classroom expectations and responsibilities are established. The development of display charts can then be used as an easy referal guide for the whole class.
- Use language that helps build a cooperative classroom climate:
  - our classroom
  - our rules of behaviour
  - our responsibility
  - we decide
- Remember that there are many different ways of structuring the learning environment to cater for the diversity of learning styles in the classroom.


In our classroom we:
• share material
• are involved in the decision-making
• listen to each other
• take turns
• use first names rather than nick names
• are expected to take responsibi lity for our own actions

FURTHER READING

Dalton, J., *Adventures in Thinking: Creative Thinking and Cooperative Talk in Small Groups*, Thomas Nelson Australia: Melbourne, 1985

Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., Holubec, E.J. & Roy, P., *Circles of Learning: Cooperation in The Classroom*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Minneapolis, 1984

Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T., *Learning Together and Alone: Cooperation, Competition and Individualization*, Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1975

Slavin, R., *Using Student Team Learning* (Revised Edition), Centre for Social Organisation of Schools, John Hopkins University: Baltimore, 1980.

* For further information on jigsaw and other strategies.

The views expressed in this pamphlet are the views of the author. They do not necessarily represent the view of the editor or the Australian Reading Association.

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